

“Do You Want to Get Well?”

Have you ever been cut in front of? Of course you have. We’ve all had someone cut in front of us in the parking lot, the grocery store line, or on the highway. If done to us enough times, or at the wrong time, it can make us angry.

Imagine for a moment that you are a paralytic who knows of a pool whose waters have the power to heal you. You know that if you could just somehow get into that water you would have a chance to walk again, but every time you try to get in someone else jumps in ahead of you. You were there first, but you were not fast enough. Besides that, you need help getting into the water because your legs do not work, and on top of that you wouldn’t be able to keep yourself afloat if you did get in. But nobody will help you, so day after day, year after year, you get cut in front of by people who have no regard for your plight. The only person they care about is themselves. This has been going on so long you that you are no longer angry, you are now hopeless. It will always be like this.

That is the story of the man in our text today. He is a paralytic and he has been hanging out at a pool that is known for its healing waters. Rumor has it that when the water bubbles an angel of the Lord heals the first person who jumps in.

Today’s story is the second great healing story in the gospel of John. It is very similar to the one we looked at last week, yet it is also quite different.

Jesus Comes to a Man Who Had Lost All Hope

Last week, when we looked at the story of the healing of the royal official’s son, we learned that the **father came** to Jesus (he took the initiative) in order to ask Jesus to heal his son. But in this story it is just the opposite. Here **Jesus comes** to the paralytic. This is because the paralytic is totally helpless. He can not walk. All he can do is sit and wait.

In last week’s story the royal official and his son were **desperate** because the son was so close to death, but in this story the paralytic is beyond desperate. He has **lost all hope** because he feels like he can do nothing to change his situation. It is true. There is nothing he can do, physically speaking.

It is easy for us to look at this story and be hard on the paralytic and accuse him of being a man who feels sorry for himself and makes excuses as to why he can not jump into the water to make himself better. We say this man ought to pull himself up by his bootstraps and quit crying, but this would be wrong.

We must remember that unlike a paraplegic today, this man had no wheelchair and even if he did walk he did it on his knuckles. His hands would have been rough, swollen, and torn. And there were few who would have offered to help him. To touch him would have been to touch someone who smelled bad because he, like most paralytics, probably had no bladder and bowel control. (Burge, NIV Application Commentary, Zondervan, p. 183)

Unlike today, this man had no social safety net to rely upon. He did not draw a disability check. His livelihood depended upon his ability to beg and people's willingness to throw him some chump change every now and then. Life was brutal. The lights had gone out. This was as good as it was going to get, so he thought. This man was hopeless because he had lost all hope. If you were him you probably would have lost hope too.

But here comes Jesus. He has compassion on this man. This paralytic, like the royal official, was another outcast in the world of Jesus. Nobody cared about this guy and they avoided him like the plague. He stunk and he was messy, yet Christ reached out to him to give him the mercy of God.

So just like last week, the first thing I would have you to notice about this text is the love of God for the least of these in society. Jesus Christ loves the broken, battered, and beaten and he is desirous of bringing healing and wholeness into their lives no matter what the cost.

So when I read this story I am reminded of what Jesus said to those in the peanut gallery when they criticized him for eating with tax collectors and sinners. Jesus said, "I have come not to call the righteous, but sinners. It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick." (Mt. 9:12)

If you understand what Jesus is saying there you will understand that he really came for everybody because everybody is a sinner and everyone is sick. This paralytic whom Jesus reached out to is just the kind of man that Jesus came for. He came to save people who were broken, battered, and beaten down by life.

This is good news for you because no matter what your problem, no matter what your situation Jesus Christ has come for you. He wants to put the broken pieces of your life back together again. Others may walk by you, others may cut in front of you, others may only care about themselves, but not Jesus. He is God in the flesh and he cares about your plight, your problems, your pain, and your brokenness, no matter what it is, or how bad it might be. We learn this truth yet again from this story. Now let's move on.

Jesus Commands the Man to Get Up and Walk! (And the problem of healing on the Sabbath)

At this point Jesus puts before the man a most profound question. He asks him, "Do you want to get well?" (v.6)

To this the man replies I have no one to help me in the pool when the water is stirred and when I do try to get in someone else goes down ahead of me.

I used to see that statement as a one of self-pity. But as I studied the passage this week and reflected more on it I began to see this response to be one of faith. I think what he is saying in his answer is of course I want to get well! That's why I come to this healing pool, but no one will help me get in and every time I try to get in someone else jumps in ahead of me.

That's all Jesus needed to hear. There was still a spark of faith in this man's life. He truly wanted to be well; he just could not make it happen in his own strength. So then Jesus commands the man to get up! Pick up your mat and walk.

The paralytic then exercises his faith and he stands up on his once limp legs and he begins to walk. Jesus, as the Son of God, had done something to him that the healing waters in that pool could have never done. Jesus healed his man and restored his body to wholeness.

There was a problem with what Jesus did. He did it on the wrong day of the week, the Sabbath.

Actually, that is not true but that is what everybody else thought. When people saw this man walk, instead of being amazed at his healing, they got hung up on the fact that you were not supposed to carry anything on the Sabbath. The text tells us that this man broke the law. That is not entirely true either.

The law that was broken was not the law in the OT scriptures but the interpretive law on the OT scriptures known as the Mishnah. So here in our text today we do **not** have a contradiction between what Jesus did and what the OT teaches. Jesus did not come to overthrow the law (the OT) but to fulfill it. Jesus is the perfect interpreter of the OT law. (Mt. 5:17)

The OT law said you shall remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy. You are to set it aside as a day of worship and rest from work. But as the years went by what was considered to be work on the Sabbath got totally out of hand. Everything became "work." So, for example it was considered a sin to carry a needle in your robe on the Sabbath. The law in the OT began to be misinterpreted and misunderstood by the masses. This reminds us that there is such a thing as a wrong interpretation. Not all interpretations of the Bible are valid, and here is an excellent example of that.

But back to the story. This man was criticized for his carrying his mat and his detractors wanted to know who it was who told him to do such a thing. Forget the fact that you are healed, we don't care about that! We just want to get the guy who told you to pick up your mat and walk on the Sabbath.

The man did know who Jesus was and Jesus could not be found. He had slipped away as he often did, because his "hour had not come."

Jesus Addresses the Man's Spiritual Condition (And the problem of sin and sickness)

But again Jesus would find this man. Jesus was not finished with him. Our Lord had not only come to bring physical wholeness to this man's life but also spiritual wholeness. Both are good, but one is better. There is only one that has eternal consequences and that is our relationship with God.

So Jesus goes to the temple and there he finds the man and he says something to him that is a little difficult for us to understand. Jesus says to the man, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

Is Jesus implying that the reason the man was an invalid in the first place was because he had sinned? In other words, do people catch diseases, get sick, or physically punished because of sin?

It is an important question to answer.

The earthquake in Haiti this past week has brought us face to face with it again because Pat Robertson said that the earthquake occurred because Haiti had sold its soul to the devil. In Haiti there is a lot of witch craft, demonic worship, and worship of dead spirits. I know because I have been there twice.

His statement has brought scorn and rightfully so.

I would like to digress for a moment to do a little theology.

What about the past natural disasters that happened in places where there was no worship of the devil? What about when Katrina hit? It spared more brothels and beer joints than it did churches. (Al Mohler Blog, 01/14/10)

It is not that simple to say that sickness and disaster is a result of sin. If that were always the case then why is it that sometimes the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer? (The Psalms, Job) We can not automatically conclude that this man's paralysis is a result of sin.

It could have been. He could have been binge drinking on the roof of his house and then fell off backwards, paralyzing his lower body. Something like that would have been a result of his sin. But he also could have been born this way, or some kind of accident might have happened to him. We don't know.

Later in John's gospel Jesus was asked which parent sinned that caused their son to be born blind? His father or mother? Jesus replied neither. He was born that way so that the mighty acts of God could be displayed in his life. (Jn. 9:1-3)

So we see here that physical calamity, sickness and disease, is not always the result of some direct sin, though it is certainly the result of living in a fallen, sinful, imperfect, broken world.

The lesson here is that we need to be careful in such speculation and be a whole lot more concerned with helping hurt people than with speculating as to why they got sick.

As for our man in the story I am inclined to think that his paralysis is not the result of his having done something bad. I think the best interpretation of the text is to simply see it as Jesus calling him to faith and repentance.

It's as if Jesus is saying to the man, stop sinning. Repent, turn from yourself and turn to God because your eternity is at stake. You were physically ill and that is a hard thing, but it is nothing compared to an eternity separate from God.

Jesus once said to his disciples, fear not the one who can kill the body, but fear the one (the devil) who can destroy both body and soul in hell. (Mt. 10:28)

I think that is what Jesus is getting at when he tells this man to “stop sinning because something worse may happen to you.” (v.14)

In any case, Jesus was interested in more than just his physical well being. He was far more concerned about his being reconciled to God so that he could be in God’s eternal kingdom. That is the chief purpose for which Jesus came. To reconcile fallen sinners to God.

Application of the Text

Today, to make a brief point of application, Jesus puts forth to us this same question, “Do you want to get well?”

You, like the paralytic, may not be able to do a thing to make your situation any better. But you still have to want to get well. That much you have to do. Some people don’t want to be well, especially spiritually. They like living their life exactly the way they are, but they are in danger of “something worse happening to them.” Don’t let that be you. Hear the Lord Jesus Christ’s warning to you today.

But if you want to get well then respond to Christ’s call and pick up your mat and walk. You **have** to respond to God’s call in your life.

It is not enough to just hear the gospel and do nothing with it. It is not enough to know that Jesus can heal. You have to pick up your mat and walk, however that might apply to your particular situation. You must have faith. Not just intellectual belief. “For even the demons believe,” as it says in the book of James. (Ja. 2:19) There must be faith. “Without faith it is impossible to please God,” says the Bible. (Heb. 11:6)

Do you want to get well? Then pick up your mat and come to the Savior today. Jesus Christ can make your life well again if you will put your trust in him.

Amen.